

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 239

**Statement in favor of continuing  
operation of Hennepin Co.  
General Hospital**

**February 1971**

Citizens League  
530 Syndicate Building  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

February 8, 1971

TO ALL MEDIA AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

The following statement was approved today by the Citizens League Board of Directors:

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The Citizens League has long been on record in favor of continuing the program of medical care and training of Hennepin County General Hospital, and in favor of a new general hospital facility, planned and developed jointly with the private hospital center adjoining it. We reaffirm that support.

The proposal to seek an additional \$18 million of borrowing authority for the construction of the new facility gives us, however, some concern. In part, it is that there has been no opportunity for either the responsible hospital planning agencies, or the public, to review and to evaluate the revised financing, in the short time since the consultants' Phase IIIA report was made public early in January. In part, too, it is a concern that this lack of understanding of the proposal is creating doubts about the intentions of the County in the minds of those who have previously been strong proponents of a new General Hospital, as well as of those in the hospital/medical community with whom the hospital must later work closely.

We urge the County Board of Commissioners, therefore, to withdraw its resolution setting a referendum on the \$18-million bond authorization for February 23.

The requirement of the 1963 law that the county seek and receive voter approval before proceeding with the replacement of the hospital was met, we believe, by the September 1969 referendum. Since then, inflation has, clearly, increased the cost of constructing a facility of the size then proposed, and approved. We do not regard this increase as, by itself, requiring a second referendum . . .

with the expense involved. We urge the County Commissioners to present to the 1971 Legislature, now in session, their case for the additional financing attributable to inflation and the prospective loss of anticipated federal aid. We believe it would be appropriate for the Legislature to authorize whatever additional bonding power may be required as a result of these changes.

If in the course of its review of the hospital proposal (in which we hope the Legislature will seek and receive the help of the members and staff of the Metropolitan Health Board and Metropolitan Council) the Legislature finds that the new cost estimate result, in a significant degree, from a change in the plan for, or from an increase in the size of, the hospital, then we believe it should require that voter approval again be secured, with the public and interested community groups given time to understand and evaluate the changed proposal.

Citizens League  
530 Syndicate Building  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

239  
APPROVED:  
Board of Directors  
February 17, 1971

STATEMENT BY THE CITIZENS LEAGUE ON THE  
HENNEPIN COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL REFERENDUM, February 23, 1971

1. The February 16 statement by a majority of the Hennepin County Commissioners basically changes the issues presented by the February 23 referendum on Hennepin County General Hospital. In their statement, the Commissioners:
  - a) Committed themselves to the 500,000-square-foot hospital.
  - b) Committed themselves to build less than this, and to use less than the full \$18 million authorization, if some beds and floor space can be made available to General Hospital from Metropolitan Medical Center.
  - c) Committed themselves to explore the sharing of services with Metropolitan Medical Center.
  - d) Committed themselves to work with other hospitals, and with the private medical community, to emphasize neighborhood-based health care centers.
2. The Citizens League had, February 8, urged that a referendum not be held . . . largely because of our concern that a simple "yes" or "no" vote, and a campaign, did not provide an adequate framework within which to talk out the concerns of several community groups -- including the Citizens League -- about the costs and financing of the hospital, about the physical relationship with the private hospital complex next door, and about the sharing of programs with other institutions. We had recommended the issue be taken, instead, to the Legislature.
3. The Commissioners' statement now makes it clear the hospital to be built will, in fact, be the 500,000-square-foot, 500-bed hospital proposed to, and approved by, the voters in September, 1969. The increases in cost for which additional bonding authorization is being sought are, therefore, those resulting from the inflation in construction costs and from the anticipated loss of prospective federal aid. This tends to reinforce our original feeling that a referendum need not be held. The issue presented remains "Shall Hennepin County maintain the programs of medical care and training provided by General Hospital, and replace its obsolete physical plant?" Clearly, the voters have answered this question in the affirmative.
4. Nevertheless, a referendum is to be held to authorize the additional financing required. The key question in responding to this voter issue is, therefore, whether a way has been provided -- other than in the Legislature -- to resolve the uncertainties remaining about the project.
5. We believe it has. The Commissioners "recognize that the development of medical resources is a community responsibility" and therefore committed themselves not to begin construction on the new hospital without approval of the Metropolitan Health Board. This commitment assures the Health Board will play a key role in the major decisions with respect to the relationship with MMC, the future of the old HCGH facility, and the cost of financing of the new hospital. A mechanism is, thereby, provided for the resolution of the concerns felt by various community groups about the future of the hospital.

6. As a consequence, it now appears that approval of the referendum -- with the conditions, and through the process, to which the County Commissioners have committed themselves -- can result in:
  - a) Early construction of the hospital approved by the voters in 1969, with consequent savings in construction costs.
  - b) Assurance that the new facility will be developed consistent with a plan for hospitals set by a community-wide mechanism.
  - c) Substantial strengthening of the health- and hospital-planning process in the Twin Cities area.
  
7. We believe approval of the referendum on these terms would be in the interest of the community, and urge a "yes" vote by residents of Hennepin County on February 23.